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ABSTRACT

Among the major concerns of the Women's Bureau are the special needs of women of various racial and ethnic backgrounds who encounter double discrimination because of their sex and their racial or ethnic origin. For those who speak English as a second language, a further barrier is added. American Indian women are one group in need of special programs to create an awareness of their job rights and to increase the accessibility of employment and training opportunities for them. In response to a successful conference on "Employment Awareness for Indian Women" held on the Shiprock, New Mexico, Navajo Reservation, this guide has been prepared to aid in conducting similar projects elsewhere. While not intended to be a comprehensive "how-to" instrument, the guide is adapted to the status of Indian women and highlights those parts of the conference program needing special consideration: strong community participation in planning phases, an opening session speaker who is a known leader, availability of bilingual interpreters, minimal or no expense to participants, briefing sessions for resource people, and follow-up mechanisms. In planning such programs, it is essential to have a knowledge of the unique legal status of Indian tribes so that provision can be made to have that issue addressed. Situations and conditions vary from reservation to reservation, making flexibility and adaptability a major requirement for the use of this guide. (Author/NEC)

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A Guide to Conducting a Conference With American Indian Women in Reservation Areas

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FOREWORD

Among the major concerns of the Women's Bureau are the special needs of women of various racial and ethnic backgrounds who encounter double discrimination because of their sex and their race or ethnic origin. For those who speak English as a second language, a further barrier is added. We have found that some minority women do not even know what their employment rights are, nor do they know what training opportunities are available. Thus the Bureau's programs are designed to create an awareness among women of their job rights and to increase the accessibility of employment and training opportunities for them. American Indian women are one group in need of this special consideration.

As part of this focus, the Bureau cosponsored a conference on "Employment Awareness for Indian Women" on the Navajo Reservation in Shiprock, New Mexico, in July 1975. It met with tremendous success. Subsequently, the Bureau and the other sponsoring groups--the North American Indian Women's Association/Navajo-Hopi Chapter, New Mexico Commission on the Status of Women, and New Mexico State University Cooperative Extension Service--have been asked for information on the Shiprock conference to aid in conducting similar projects elsewhere. This guide is designed to serve that purpose. While not intended to be a comprehensive "how-to" instrument, the guide is adapted to the status of Indian women and highlights those parts of the conference program needing special consideration.

It should be noted that in planning such a program, it is very important to have a knowledge of the unique legal status of Indian tribes so that provision can be made to have this issue addressed. It must also be kept in mind that situations and conditions vary from reservation to reservation, making flexibility and adaptability a major requirement for the use of this guide.

Alexis M. Herman
Director, Women's Bureau

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BACKGROUND

Economic Status of Reservation Indians

Some of the problems facing Indian people living in reservation areas are: cultural differences, language barriers, geographic isolation, low educational attainment, absence of sufficient employment/training opportunities, and limited community services and facilities. Added to this is the resistance to social change which often accompanies economic growth. Because of the lack of opportunities on reservations, large numbers of Indians have, in the past, moved into urban areas in search of a better way of life. Many were ill-prepared to deal with the pressures and mechanics of urban living and found transition formidable. Because of the severe competition for limited job opportunities and the everpresent need and desire to identify with cultural roots, the trend now seems to have reversed itself. Substantial numbers of Indians are returning to the reservations. As a result, many reservations are undergoing rapid change, not only because of the growth in population but also because the returnees bring with them new ideas and skills. The influx of returnees is beginning to move the reservation from a subsistence to a money economy.

The current status of Indians shows that progress has been made in some aspects of their lives. Mineral, industrial, and commercial developments are resulting in denser aggregations of the population. With these developmental activities, more opportunities are becoming available. Starting from a level of extreme disadvantage, employment, education, health, and housing, conditions are being improved but the levels achieved thus far still leave Indians far behind other Americans.

From the perspective of long-range economic development, many reservations are endowed with natural resources which would allow economic development at a level sufficient to offset many on-going economic problems such as low per capita income and high rate of unemployment. There is much

community effort taking place. Tribal leaders are gaining experience in planning and managing their own affairs. Their growing responsibilities require them to understand many complex legal and business matters. They are agreed that development of such skills and knowledge is a prerequisite to self-determination and self-government.

Status and Changing Roles of Indian Women

In the social system of many tribes, status is ascribed at birth. The division of labor is based on the family, clan, and tribal systems into which a person is born. In these communal societies, the activities of the group, whether in the extended family, in the clan, or in the tribe, are not so restrictive in nature as to deny individuals the opportunity to use their skills and knowledge to help achieve group goals. Through the ages, Indian women have held positions of honor and leadership and have enjoyed personal freedom. However, in more recent times, their traditional roles have been threatened by the acculturation process.

With increased exposure to non-Indian cultures and life styles, and constant pressure for change, internal relationships and group cohesion have become strained because of the uneven acculturation among individuals of the same group. Many communities have been polarized over the degree to which non-Indian ways should be accepted: traditional groups tending to be apprehensive and the progressive groups pushing for change. In some communities, there has been a breakdown in cultural unity. There are differences in viewpoint and knowledge, differences in interests and ambition, differences that exist all along the line. There are Indians who refuse to accept unfamiliar customs, there are Indians who have adopted the life styles of the dominant society. These shifts have had a tremendous impact on the roles of Indian women. In varying degrees, their individual freedom has been lost in a second-place role in the family and in the tribal setting.

In more recent times, there has been the beginning of a revitalization of traditional values and life styles. Indian women are recognizing that culture and traditions need not be sacrificed while they make necessary adjustments to a new way of living. Traditional traits can be tremendous assets as they make choices critical to progress. Indian women are emerging as an influential force in the develop-

mental process which is taking place. They are again taking positions of leadership. An increasing number are accommodating themselves to the social, economic and governmental systems generally prevailing in the rest of the country. But economically, they still have the lowest income level of any group in the Nation.

Their employment situation has changed in recent years. Indian women are employed in many occupations from home crafts to professional careers in medicine, the arts, engineering, and law. There has been noticeable improvement in their status since 1970 when, according to the census, over half of all employed Indian women 16 years of age and over were employed as service and clerical workers. The recent trend indicates that many Indian women desire and are seeking employment opportunities and career advancement. They recognize that if they are to attain economic self-sufficiency, they need outside support and resources. They need assistance that is responsive to their special needs and concerns.

THE SHIPROCK SITUATION

Indian communities are frequently faced with critical situations which require a combination of agencies and resources to resolve. One such situation arose in the Shiprock, New Mexico, community when about one-third of the employed women suddenly found themselves unemployed. In contemplating their plight, the women realized that unemployment was not their sole problem. Even while employed they faced other kinds of problems such as unsatisfactory working conditions and unfair employment practices. Their basic problem was that they were uninformed about their employment rights and benefits, and were also unaware of alternatives to the situation in which they found themselves. An analysis of local and other sources of assistance led them to consider several solutions. They decided to seek ways to bring about change through cooperative community effort. They requested help from the Women's Bureau. An informal coalition was formed to plan, organize, and implement a conference on employment awareness. Included in the coalition were the Navajo-Hopi Chapter of the North American Indian Women's Association (NAIWA), the New Mexico Commission on the Status of Women, New Mexico State University Cooperative Extension Services, and the Women's Bureau. The procedures developed are outlined in the following section.

THE CONFERENCE

This section contains practical steps in the process of planning and implementing a conference to address the economic and employment issues important to Indian women. The Ship-

rock conference provides an example of how and why certain steps are needed in conducting such conferences on Indian reservations.

I. Planning Phase

Planning Committee

It is important to form a planning committee with strong community participation. Community representatives must be involved from the beginning in order for leadership to develop the kind of know-how which can sustain the local group over the long run. Leadership development opportunities for Indian women are of particular importance now more than ever. In recent years, and especially since the passage of P.L. 93-638, the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, the Indian people are assuming greater responsibility for the planning and implementation of their own programs. This law provides them with decision-making powers such as they have never had before. Opportunities must be provided Indian women to exercise their capabilities so that they can participate in the policy- and decision-making process.

The principal coordinator of the Shiprock conference was one of the local women. Working together with volunteers from the community and with representatives of the other three sponsoring groups, she was able to outline a broad agenda for a 2-day conference that was specifically geared to deal with the local situation.

Program Planning

Goals: Short-range goals were

-- to educate and inform Indian women about laws safeguarding women's job rights and benefits

-- to provide information to assist in the development of strategies by Indian women for utilizing resources and services more effectively

-- to encourage Indian women to participate more fully in decision-making and economic developmental activities within their communities

Long-range goals were

-- to facilitate the formation of coalitions of Indian women's groups and other more established groups for mutual support and the interchange of

ideas. Indian women, particularly those living in reservation areas, are not oriented to generally accepted organization procedures. In recent years, Indian women have begun to band together for various causes. This movement needs to be encouraged and reinforced. Indian women increasingly understand the significance and impact of group action and are realizing that becoming part of coalitions gives them greater visibility, resources, and strength in dealing with public and private sectors.

-- to promote further outreach by informed group members to other Indian women. Since a tradition of duties and obligations to others is already highly developed among Indian people, Indian women will readily share their knowledge and skills.

Methodology: Sessions need to be designed to provide maximum participation through open discussions, first-hand encounters with role models, and active exchange of ideas and information with resource people and with each other. Sound principles of group work should be emphasized and demonstrated as an important means of bringing about planned change. The goal of active participation should be woven into the total program.

Program Structure: The opening presentation is of particular importance in order that a favorable social climate be created in which effective interaction can take place. One suggestion for a good opening is a keynote speaker who is a member of the group and recognized by them as a leader. In the reservation setting, where Indian women tend to be more traditional and to remain more isolated from the outside society, they need to see evidence that one from among them has been successful while retaining the culture and traditions of her tribe.

The keynote speaker in Shiprock was a Navajo woman who is a successful administrator of a state-wide Indian program which affects a large part of the Navajo Reservation.

Workshops designed to bring about the greatest degree of individual participation and information retention are essential if the women are to benefit in a meaningful way. They are more likely to take an active part in smaller, informal groups.

Five workshops were planned in Shiprock with about 20 to 30 people in each group. These were considered ideal working groups by the participants.

Workshops should be designed to be responsive to the unique characteristics of the participants. This means that bilingual interpreters should be available and presentations by panelists should show respect for differences in values and attitudes.

A very high percentage of Navajo people speak their own language. There was no problem finding Navajo women who were fluent in both Navajo and English. Panelists who were not Indian were requested to keep in mind that some of the participants had limited exposure to the non-Indian world.

Workshops should also include Indian panelists who can serve as facilitators.

In Shiprock, all the moderators and about half of the panelists were Indian. This resulted in enthusiastic participation by group members.

A final panel, with ample opportunity for group discussion, should provide all participants with the chance to use their newly acquired knowledge and skills to work with employers and trainers on clarification of mutual misunderstandings and communication gaps. With the confidence they gain from being well-informed and having the kind of support they need, they will express themselves quite well.

The first part of the Shiprock conference was designed to give the participants a chance to clarify and understand their own problems by giving them as much information as possible. Later they were provided an opportunity to consider alternatives and possible solutions through interaction with people who direct employment and training programs.

Location: The major criterion for selecting a site should be its accessibility and acceptability to potential participants in order to facilitate maximum attendance. Too frequently, conferences on Indian affairs are held in urban areas, and the majority of the people who are affected most directly by the deliberations and decisions are not able to attend. Indian people realize that meaningful and lasting development must be a shared experience, so every effort should be made to reach as many people as possible.

Shiprock is located in the northern part of the Navajo reservation and has one of the largest concentrations of

Navajo people. The conference was attended by women who have always been reservation residents and who represent the last enclave of traditional Indian tribalism.

Resource People: The success of the project depends a great deal on the personal relationships which develop among all the people in attendance. There should be a good balance of people: some from outside the community who possess certain kinds of expertise, local resource people who are knowledgeable about local conditions and problems, established Indian women who can serve as role models, and members of the local group who can serve as facilitators. Since reservation laws are determined by the tribal governing body, officials of the tribal council should be involved.

The Shiprock conference included Federal and State resource people who had a broad range of expertise in employment-related fields, community workers, local employers and trainers, and tribal members who are considered successful by the local group. Also present and participating were members of the tribal council and a representative from the tribal chairman's office.

Publicity: A good public relations effort will help to ensure the success of the conference. The major responsibility for publicizing the event will fall to the local sponsoring group. To rally support for community followup activities from outside resources, off-reservation newspapers should be utilized. Tribal newspapers, posters, and radio stations, if they exist, should also be used. Perhaps the most effective form of communication is the "moccasin telegraph"--word of mouth. By this means women who do not have access to the above mentioned forms of communication can be reached.

All these forms of communications were used in Shiprock and this contributed greatly to the effectiveness of followup activities.

Conference Expenses: To ensure maximum attendance, conference expenses should be kept at a minimum if not eliminated all together.

At Shiprock, because of the widespread unemployment, no registration fee was charged. There were few expenses because conference planners decided to utilize community facilities which were quite adequate. Although there was a lack of public accommodations such as motels and transportation, the participants and resource people did

not allow this to be a hinderance. The cost of telephone calls, reproduction of programs, news releases and other incidental expenses were borne by the sponsoring groups.

Materials: In addition to materials on employment and economic development (see suggested list in appendix B), information kits should include data on the local group. A kit should include information on the economic status of Indian women, the reservation and community economy, and local and State resources. Research and preparation of such information should be undertaken by the sponsoring groups.

There was limited printed material on the local situation at Shiprock.

II. Implementation

Briefing Session for Resource People

There should be a briefing session to make certain all resource people are informed of last-minute changes and of current happenings within the community. Also, some resource people may not have experience working with Indian people and may need some direction in their approach in order to create an atmosphere for active interaction.

This proved to be a very important part of the total effort in Shiprock. The group went into the community better coordinated and able to cooperate more effectively.

Activity

With good coordination between the sponsoring groups and with maximum community participation, the conference will be successful. The Indian women who serve as facilitators will play a major role in helping to develop effective communication between resource people and participants.

The direction of the program for the Shiprock conference was left to the local group since they had to establish their own priorities, with the technical assistance of outside resource people. Because of this kind of involvement, the Indian women were determined that the conference should come up with some concrete results.

Followup Mechanism

Local Action Groups: The Navajo-Hopi Chapter of NAIWA gained many new members during the conference and thus it became a stronger, more viable force within the community. During the sessions, the women

expressed interest in various concerns, so informal committees and working groups formed to explore specific subjects.

Resource People: The resource people succeeded in establishing good working relationships with the participants, and they have continued to be supportive of followup activities and other events.

III. Outcome

Results

Throughout the conference, the participants should be encouraged to think about some of the things they can do as individuals or as a group to resolve the conditions they want corrected or changed. Although Indian women are accustomed to group activity and take major responsibility in their extended families, clans, and tribes, many have not participated in formal deliberations and are not familiar with political processes. Facts, ideas, and examples should be presented in such a way as to encourage the formation of action-oriented committees and coalitions.

In Shiprock, the Indian women took up the challenge and suggested a number of recommendations for economic improvement. There were also recommendations dealing with the concerns of young people on the reservation. Having acquired the tools to work with, the women also discussed strategies for achieving the specific goals they had established for themselves.

Recommendations and Action

-- That the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) establish a Federal Women's Program (FWP) at each of its agencies on the reservation.

One of the women who took a very active part in the conference now serves as FWP coordinator for the Shiprock agency. There are five BIA agencies on the reservation and all now have FWP coordinators.

-- That the Navajo Tribal Council cosponsor employment workshops for women at the chapter levels.

Because of the success of the Shiprock conference, a larger regional conference was held in Window Rock, Arizona. The leaders at the Shiprock conference were asked to provide technical assistance in its organization. All effort was directed toward

the success of this meeting rather than promoting workshops at the chapter level of which there are 96. While not cosponsoring, the Navajo Tribal Council has been supportive of these efforts.

-- That the Governor of New Mexico appoint a Navajo woman to the New Mexico Commission on the Status of Women.

At the time of the Shiprock conference, there was a Pueblo woman serving on the commission. Her term has since expired. In January 1978, Governor Apodaca announced the appointment of Adele Lope, the Shiprock coordinator, to the commission.

-- That the Bureau of Indian Affairs establish an all-vocational school on the reservation.

The Navajo Tribal Council had requested the BIA to convert the Intermountain Indian School in Utah into a vocational school rather than to shut it down altogether. As a result of the expressed need for vocational training, the Intermountain School has been retained as a high school with a vocational training department. The Navajo Community College has also added vocational courses to its curriculum.

-- That the tribe establish a youth center in the Shiprock area.

A youth center has been established through assistance and support from various community agencies. The center has a drug abuse and a first offender program. It also has a program for high school dropouts. An extensive recreation program is provided.

-- That the tribe abolish poverty level guidelines for participation in summer youth programs.

While the guidelines have not been abolished, they have been relaxed. A sliding scale is used to determine eligibility.

-- That Adele Lope, Shiprock conference coordinator, be sent to Washington, D.C., to attend the 55th Anniversary of the Women's Bureau.

Ms. Lope, along with a number of Indian women from across the nation, did attend and participate in various roles.

Effects

When the participants have taken group action and established relationships, the mechanism is set in place through which continued activity can take place. The success of the project can best be measured by the after-effects of the conference.

Some other effects of the Shiprock conference are the following:

- Recruitment and employment of more Indian women by local employers and also more involvement in the CETA program.
- A number of the participants returning to school.
- Stepped-up promotional activities by the Office of Navajo Labor Relations for the hiring of more Navajos by contractors on the reservation.
- The development of new leadership which is resulting in greater participation in community development.
- Formation of voluntary action groups to follow through on recommendations that were adopted at the conference.
- Request to local leadership from other communities for technical assistance to organize similar conferences in reservation areas in other parts of the country.
- Other conferences held in Shiprock:

  "Consumer Education and Equal Credit Opportunity for Indian Women," April 1976

  "Battered Women and Children Conference," May 1977 (Resulted in establishment of a shelter and efforts are now being made to establish a hotline.)

  "Job Finding Skills for Indian Women," July 1977

APPENDIX A

SUGGESTED PROGRAM

(Day, date)

7:00 a.m. Registration

9:00 a.m. Opening Session

Presiding:

- Flag Song

- Invocation

Welcome:

Introductory Remarks: (by representatives of sponsoring groups)

Introduction of Special Guests

Keynote Speech:

10:00 a.m. Coffee Break

10:30 a.m. Workshops

1. Supportive Services for Working Women
2. How To Get Credit for What You Have Learned in Finding and Keeping a Job
3. Young People in a New Era*
4. Employment Discrimination
5. Money and You: Financial Responsibility and Credit

12:00 noon Lunch

Speech: (speaker and subject to be decided by community and sponsoring groups)

*Some of the young people in Shiprock felt they should not have been separated from everyone else because they had much to learn from the other workshops. (The alternative might be for young people to have a special panel somewhere else on the program.)

2:00 p.m. Workshops (repeat)

3:30 p.m. Coffee Break

4:00 p.m. Workshop Reports

(Day, date)

9:00 a.m. Panel of Employers, Training Officers, and Indian Employees

Moderator:

Panel Discussion:

1. What are the problems Indian women face when seeking and retaining employment?
2. What problems do employers face when recruiting and maintaining Indian women as employees?
3. What efforts are presently being made to train and employ Indian women?
4. What possible alternatives and solutions should be considered when seeking and retaining Indian personnel?

Open Dialogue

11:30 a.m. Closing Session

Summary of Recommendations

Closing Remarks: (by representatives of the sponsoring groups)

12:30 p.m. Adjournment

APPENDIX B

SUGGESTED EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

We would appreciate your completing this form to help us plan for conferences of this type in other reservation areas.

1. What part of the conference did you like best? (Check one or list them 1, 2, 3 in the order of your preference.)

   _____ Keynote speech

   _____ Workshops

   _____ Panel of employers, employees, and training officers

   _____ Other (identify)_____

2. What part was the least interesting?_____

   _____

3. Do you feel that the conference was worthwhile?

   _____Yes _____No

4. How much new information did you get from the sessions?

   _____A great deal _____A fair amount _____Very little

5. Was enough time given for audience participation?

   _____Yes _____No

6. What suggestions do you have to improve a conference of this type?

   _____

   _____

7. Other comments:_____

   _____

   _____

APPENDIX C

SUGGESTED MATERIALS FOR KITS

Women's Bureau, Department of Labor

- Brief Highlights of Major Federal Laws and Order on Sex Discrimination in Employment
- The Women's Bureau: 55 Years of Partnership With Women
- A Working Woman's Guide to Her Job Rights
- Get Credit for What You Know
- Publications of the Women's Bureau
- American Indian Women (fact sheet)

Wage and Hour Division, Department of Labor

- Age Discrimination in Employment Act. (Publication 1230)
- Equal Pay. (Publication 1179)
- Handicapped? You Have Job Rights! (Poster)

Employment and Training Administration, Department of Labor

- Merchandising Your Job Talents

Bureau of Labor Statistics, Department of Labor

- Jobs for Which Apprenticeships Are Available
- Jobs for Which a High School Education is Preferred but Not Essential
- Jobs for Which a High School Education is Generally Required
- Jobs for Which Junior College, Technical Institute, or Other Specialized Training Is Usually Required
- Jobs for Which a College Education Is Usually Required

APPENDIX C (continued)

Office for Civil Rights, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare

Equal Educational Services

I Have a Right to My Native American Culture and Language (Poster)

* U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1978-- 274-641/1457